Glossary

Aggregate Data: The data concentrated at a central server. Aggregate data are used for analytical purposes.

Application Service Provider (ASP): A company that provides a range of computer application services, such as hosting a software application. The ASP is normally the developer of the software product. Clients access the software via the Internet, often using a secure connection. The ASP is responsible for maintaining and upgrading the software on an ongoing basis.

Audit Trail System: An extensive auditing system that monitors, records and reports on what valid users of the HMIS are doing.

Authentication: The process of ensuring that messages between client and server computers are genuine, and have been sent from the system claiming to be the source of the message.

Central Server: A computer or group of computers that contain the database and those parts of the software application that are not installed directly on the client computer, but are located in a central location that is accessed by all users of the system.

Client Computer: The equipment that the end user uses to access the HMIS. It is most often referred to as a desktop personal computer or workstation. The client computer is normally connected to a server to access information.

Client/Server System: Architecture in which the client and server computers are connected via a Local Area Network (LAN) or Wide Area Network (WAN). The client computer handles the user interface and may perform some or all of the application processing. A database server maintains the databases and processes requests to extract data or update the database.

Client/Server Information System: A system that takes advantage of the processing power of personal computers by splitting the job of delivering quality information to end users among multiple computers.

Concurrent Users: The total number of computer users accessing a system at a given time.

Consent Form: The consumer's written authorization agreeing to let an agency collect and/or share data using the HMIS, as specified by the agreement.

Consumer: An individual or family experiencing homelessness.

Data Sharing Agreement: Agreement among participating agencies pertaining to the sharing of consumer data.

Database: Computer files that hold data in a systematic organization.

Database Administrator (DBA): The person or group of individuals responsible for monitoring, maintaining and servicing the HMIS's data files.

Decryption: Conversion of scrambled text back into understandable, plain text form. Decryption uses an algorithm that reverses the process used during encryption.

Desktop Software: Computer programs designed to accomplish specific types of tasks or transactions. Word processing applications, spreadsheets packages, presentation software, email applications, and Internet browsers are examples of desktop software.

Digital Certificate: An attachment to a message or data that verifies the identity of a sender.

Digital IDs: Digital certificates issued from certificate authorities such as VeriSign, containing an organization's encrypted public key along with a minimal amount of information about the organization such as name and address.

Digital Signature: Signature attached to transmitted documents in order to ensure the authenticity of the sender.

Digital Subscriber Line (DSL): Communications line that uses existing phone wires to provide transmission speeds that are 10 times the speed of a modem connection.

Encryption: Conversion of plain text into encrypted data by scrambling it using a code that masks the meaning of the data to any unauthorized viewer. Computers encrypt data by using algorithms or formulas. Encrypted data are not readable unless they are converted back into plain text via decryption.

End-user: The person working for a participating agency who will be using the HMIS.

Firewall: A hardware and/or software system that enforces access control policies between two networks, usually between a Local Area Network (LAN) and the Internet. A firewall allows only specific kinds of information to flow in and out of the local network. This protects the computers and data on the LAN from intruders or hackers who might try to use the Internet to break into those systems.

Functionality: Activities or operations that a software system is capable of performing.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): Computerized data collection tools designed to capture client-level information over time on the characteristics and service needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness.

Host: A computer system or organization that plays a central role, normally providing data storage and/or application services to participating agencies.

Hub: A device that connects several computers together. Wires from the hub run to each of the computers in the network, allowing them to communicate with the server and each other.

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML): The presentation language used to format data for World Wide Web browsers; HTML provides a means of both entering content and formatting the content for presentation.

Hypertext Transport Protocol (HTTP): The protocol that carries HTML pages.

Information Management Software: Computer programs used to manage operations that include data stored in a database. These products can handle multiple users running the same application at one time. HMIS solutions are a type of information management software.

Internet: A set of interconnected networks that forms the basis for the World Wide Web.

Internet Service Provider (ISP): Any company that provides individuals or organizations with access to the Internet.

Intranet: A network or group of networks communicating with each other via Internet protocols (such as HTTP and TCP/IP). Intranets are often used within agencies for internal communication. An intranet is not necessarily connected to the Internet.

Local Area Network (LAN): A network that is geographically limited, allowing easy interconnection of computers within offices or buildings.

Logon Process: The process that allows users to validate their authenticity.

Modem: Data communications device that transforms digital signals to analog, transmits the analog signals over conventional telephone lines, and carries out the reverse transformation at the destination to enable remote computer communications.

Network: Several computers connected to each other.

Network Administration: An individual or group of individuals with responsibility for setting up, operating and maintaining the HMIS's data communications network.

Participating Agency: An agency that operates with an HMIS.

Public Key: Public keys are included in digital certificates and contain information that a sender can use to encrypt information such that only a particular person can read. The recipient can also verify the identity of the sender through the sender's public key.

Real-Time: HMIS data is processed and available to other users as it is entered into the system.

Record-level Encryption: Encryption that occurs at the field (data element) level within a record of information.

Relational Database: A collection of data items organized as a set of formally described tables in which data is stored. This is the standard structure for service transactions such as bed nights, intakes, or client interviews.

Relational Model: A database model that describes data in which all data elements are placed in two-dimensional tables (relations) that are the logical equivalents of files.

Server Computer: A computer that provides a service for other computers connected to it via a network. Servers can host and send files, data, or programs to client computers.

Site: A location that uses an HMIS and at which services to the homeless and near homeless are provided.

Software Escrow: A software product may be put in escrow with a trusted third party (e.g., companies such as Iron Mountain and Innovasafe) to protect the interests of the software vendors' clients in the event that the software vendor can no longer support the product.

Software License Agreement: Agreement between the developer of a software product and the users of the software that specifies the rules under which software distribution, installation and usage can occur.

Structured Query Language (SQL): A database language used to manipulate relational databases. SQL was adopted as an industry standard in 1986.

T1 Line: Communications line that can carry voice or data at transmission speeds that are 25 times the speed of a modem connection.

Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP): This is the Internet's fundamental communications protocol.

Two-Tier/Three-Tier: Client/server architecture in which the user interface runs on the client computer and the database is stored on the server. The actual processing can occur on either the client or the server computer. Newer client/server architecture, known as three-tier, introduces a middle tier where the processing occurs.

Virtual Private Network (VPN): A group of computer systems that communicate securely over a public network.

Web-Enabled Application: Application software designed to operate as an Internet application. Users access the system with a Web browser such as Netscape or Internet Explorer.

Web Browser: Software, such as Netscape or Internet Explorer, that provides a graphical interface to the Web.

Web Server: A computer that runs specialized web server software, which supports HTTP in order to organize multiple client requests for Web pages.

Wide Area Network (WAN): A network that is not geographically limited, and can link computers in different locales and extend over large distances. A WAN is often used to connect computers that are not located in the same office or building.

World Wide Web (WWW): An Internet information management system. On the WWW all information is represented to the user as a hypertext object in HTML format. The client program, or browser, runs on the user's computer and provides basic navigation, data entry and validation.

Appendix A: HMIS Evaluation Methodology

This appendix describes the overall methodology used in the HMIS solution review to identify and assess the HMIS solutions included in this guide.

Solution Review Overview

The HMIS solution review process began in October 2001 and concluded in September 2002. At the beginning of the process, the review team designed a multi-phase process to identify and assess the many different HMIS solutions currently available on the market.

The process consists four phases:

- ◆ Phase One includes the initial HMIS solution provider survey; the identification of potential HMIS solution providers; the dissemination of the survey instrument; and the analysis of results.

- ◆ Phase Two is the selection of HMIS solution providers to undergo an indepth review.

- ◆ Phase Three is the indepth review, including lab evaluations; interviews with customers; and solution provider site visits.

- ◆ Phase Four is the compilation and analysis of the results from site visits and the lab.

The review team was comprised of 10 CSP staff members, interns and consultants. Review team members offered both program knowledge and technical competence to provide both depth and breadth to the results. To ensure independent, unbiased assessments, six team members were hired specifically for this project and did not have prior experience with any of the HMIS solutions being assessed.

Initial HMIS Solution Provider Survey

The process of identifying potential HMIS solution providers began in the fall of 2001. A search was undertaken to locate all software vendors with HMIS-related system capabilities, such as comprehensive case management, information and referral, intake, outreach, and pertinent reporting.

The search used a variety of resources beginning with the solution provider list from the previous HMIS Consumer Guide.[25] Thorough searches were performed using the Internet. In addition, staff contacted experts in communities around the country, government officials, and human services personnel knowledgeable in information technology. After several months of research, a list of 57 solution providers was compiled. Vendors on the list ranged from large, multibillion dollar consulting firms to small, one-person operations. The software varied from comprehensive, custom, statewide systems to single purpose applications.

Next, review team members made contact with appropriate representatives at each solution provider to notify them of the forthcoming HMIS questionnaire and to explain the survey process. Each of the solution providers was informed that by responding to the extensive survey, they would be considered for the indepth review. Through the process of contacting the original 57 solution providers, team members

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[25] In 2000, CSP was contracted by Aspen to conduct a similar, though less intensive, review of available HMIS solutions. These results were compiled in *Homeless Management Information Systems: An In-Depth Look*, Center for Social Policy, McCormack Institute, University of Massachusetts Boston (January 2001).

discovered that many software vendors had either changed their lines of business or had ceased operations entirely; therefore, the survey was sent to the 29 remaining HMIS providers. These providers are identified in Appendix B.

The questionnaire included information on over 280 specific topics related to software, support, consulting, training, pricing, technology, and company operations. Twenty-one solution providers submitted responses. By choosing not to respond to the survey, eight solution providers opted out of inclusion in the solution review.

Selection of HMIS Solution Providers for an Indepth Review

Based on the results from the initial questionnaire, the review team selected a subset of solution providers for an indepth review. This subset included each of the providers that met specific conditions, defined by eight indepth review selection criteria.

The selection criteria were expressly identified based on the specific needs of communities representing CoC across the country (see Table 48). Systems needed to offer basic "out-of-the-box" capabilities, meaning that the solution had to include certain functionality without any customization. These out-of-the-box features included the capacity to handle case management over time; specific demographic data fields; and the ability to provide an unduplicated count. In addition, HMIS solution providers were required to have an existing product and at least one multi-agency customer at the time of the survey.

After the selection criteria were applied to the questionnaire responses, each solution provider was contacted directly to verify the accuracy of the results. Eleven of the 21 HMIS solutions were identified for the indepth review. Each of the 21 solution providers was notified of its selection status both orally and in writing.

Table 48: Indepth Review Selection Criteria

Selection Criteria	Detailed Explanation	Significance
Capabilities		
Ability to handle case management over a period of time	The solution must be able to capture not only the current status of case management related data elements, but also identify changes in specific data elements over time; thereby, storing previous values and the date changes occurred.	The ability to track change in a client's status over time is important in measuring client, program, and service level outcomes across the system.
Reporting capabilities	The solution must have report writing capabilities that allow for specific reports based on HMIS customer needs.	The ability to generate numbers, statistics, and trends enables communities to analyze client information across programs, agencies, and for the entire service system.
Capture demographic, family member, residential history, income, military status, and exit related data elements	The solution must have these categories of data elements as part of the standard out-of-the-box implementation.	The system must be able to record and store client level information that can be used for aggregate reporting.

Selection Criteria	Detailed Explanation	Significance
Capable of providing data for an unduplicated count	The solution must track clients using some form of unique identifier. That unique identifier must be capable of associating with other clients to represent parent/child relationships.	Unique identifiers allow for the ability to generate an unduplicated count of clients for a jurisdiction or Continuum of Care.
Flexibility		
Able to add data elements	The solution must have the capability to either allow customers to create "user defined" fields, or the solution provider must offer as standard business practice the option to customize the solution either for a fee or as part of the original contract.	The ability to add data elements allows an application to be flexible enough to meet the specific needs of individual programs.
Security		
At least user authentication level security	The solution must have user name and password login capabilities.	A minimal level of security is important to ensure that only authorized users are adding, editing, or changing a client's records.
Technology		
Existing product	The solution must be classified as "General Availability" and, therefore, the source code must be static. In other words, the solution must not be classified as "Beta" and undergoing testing and debugging even if installed at customer sites and being used in a production manner.	The product must be in use in a production manner and not only in a test environment. This ensures that a product has a proven track record of use.
Customers		
At least one client with a multi-agency user base	The solution must be used in "live" production at a minimum of at least one paying customer with a multi-agency implementation.	This ensures the system is operational and able to gather client information across a continuum.

Indepth Review Process

Review team members conducted an indepth review for each of the 11 solutions that met the selection criteria. The process was structured to capture multiple perspectives and included three main types of activities:

- ◆ HMIS solution customer site visits.
- ◆ HMIS solution provider site visits.
- ◆ Lab evaluations.

Together these activities are designed to represent a holistic perspective of each solution.

HMIS Solution Customer Site Visits

The HMIS solution customer site visits were invaluable to the evaluation process. Interviews with users of the solution provided insight into the long-term issues of system performance and vendor support that are not apparent in a lab environment.

Each HMIS solution provider was asked to supply five customers as references for the review team to visit. To be considered, references needed to have implemented the solution, and be using it on a regular basis. When possible, sites were selected with community-wide HMISs with a combination of emergency shelter and transitional housing programs. Review team members contacted each reference, identifying a minimum of two to visit. Sites were selected based on the scope and types of services offered as well as the length of time using the system.

Review team members spent up to a half day at each site. During the course of each visit, reviewers interviewed various staff members representing case management, intake, reporting, system administration, technical support, and contract administration functions within the local homeless system. Discussions focused on the HMIS solution's strengths, weaknesses, ease of use, stability, and practicality. Staff was asked about the solution provider's training methods, support responsiveness, general approach to dealing with customers, and pricing. Site visits also provided an opportunity to learn about the types of service providers (e.g. domestic violence, transitional housing, and emergency assistance programs) that use the solution within each community, and how the solution fits into providers' daily processes.

<u>Solution Provider Visits</u>

Vendors had the opportunity to explain their business practices and system during the solution provider site visit. Review team members visited each HMIS solution provider's offices and spoke with management and key personnel about business operations, product development strategies, and long-term viability. Discussions with sales, marketing, support, operations, and finance staff were conducted over a half-day period. As part of each visit, review team members toured the facilities.

<u>Lab Evaluation Plan</u>

At the beginning of the indepth review process, prior to candidate selection, the review team developed a comprehensive lab evaluation plan, including evaluation criteria and standards for:

◆ Evaluation environments.
◆ Evaluation activities.
◆ Evaluation inputs, including a fictitious lab community and profiles for specific agencies, programs, clients, and staff members.

Evaluation Environments

To replicate the diverse computer configurations used by agencies across the nation, different technology evaluation environments were established for the lab evaluation. To ensure comprehensive evaluation coverage, the computer hardware, software, and connectivity configurations included both old and new technologies. Each evaluation environment was comprised of a specific microprocessor, memory, disk space, screen size, operating system, connectivity, and browser combination, as listed below in Table 49.

Decisions regarding these technology combinations were based on a survey conducted by Gifts In Kind International in January 2001, *Technology Tracking Study of the National Human Services Data Consortium Members*.[26]

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[26] The Gifts In Kind survey results encompassed responses from 349 agencies in 20 communities throughout the United States, including Puerto Rico.

Table 49: Evaluation Environment Technologies[27]

PC Brands	Processors	Operating Systems	Memory	Browsers	Connectivity	Display Settings
Dell, NEC	Pentium IV 1.8GHz; Pentium II 350 MHz; or Pentium 133 MHz	Windows 98, 2000, or XP	32, MB, 64 MB, or 256 MB	Internet Explorer, Netscape, AOL 7	56K Dial-up; DSL/Cable; or LAN/T1	800x 600 or 1024 x 768

Newer computers, high speed Internet connection environments were tested on computers purchased in early 2002, using high-speed, T1 internet connection. The computers featured Pentium IV, 1.8 GHz processors and were running Windows 2000 or Windows XP.

Older computers, high speed Internet connection environments were tested on computers purchased in 1998 or earlier, using a high-speed Internet connection. The computers featured Pentium, 133 MHz processors or Pentium II, 350 MHz processors and were running Windows 98.

Older computers, dial-up Internet connection environments were tested on computers purchased in 1998 or earlier, using a dial-up Internet connection. The computers featured Pentium II, 350 MHz processors and were running Windows 98. A 56k modem was used; AOL was the Internet Service Provider.

Evaluation Activities

Evaluation activities were designed to simulate potential HMIS uses for case workers, agency directors, and system administrators. Fifty-six evaluation activities (some of which were later consolidated) covered a range of intake, case management, operational, reporting, and administrative functions. These evaluation activities were organized into a standard procedure that was performed on each HMIS solution. Most of the activities were completed multiple times; thus, the eventual review protocol included 268 separate tasks. The general activity categories are described in Chapter Two, and reported in Chapters Three and Four.

Lab Evaluation Community, Agencies, and Programs

To support the lab evaluation process, a fictitious lab community was developed encompassing two primary agencies, each with two programs. The four programs included an emergency shelter, a transitional housing program, a permanent housing operation, and a services-only program that delivered counseling, case management, training, and outreach. Additional programs were established for referral purposes. Data sharing practices between agencies and programs were also set up.

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[27] This table displays the specific types of technologies used during the lab evaluation. These variables were combined into multiple configurations to create the various evaluation environments. The terms used in this table are defined in the glossary and in Chapter Two.

The graphic below displays the process of clients entering an agency with a variety of programs, and moving to a different agency for other services and housing.
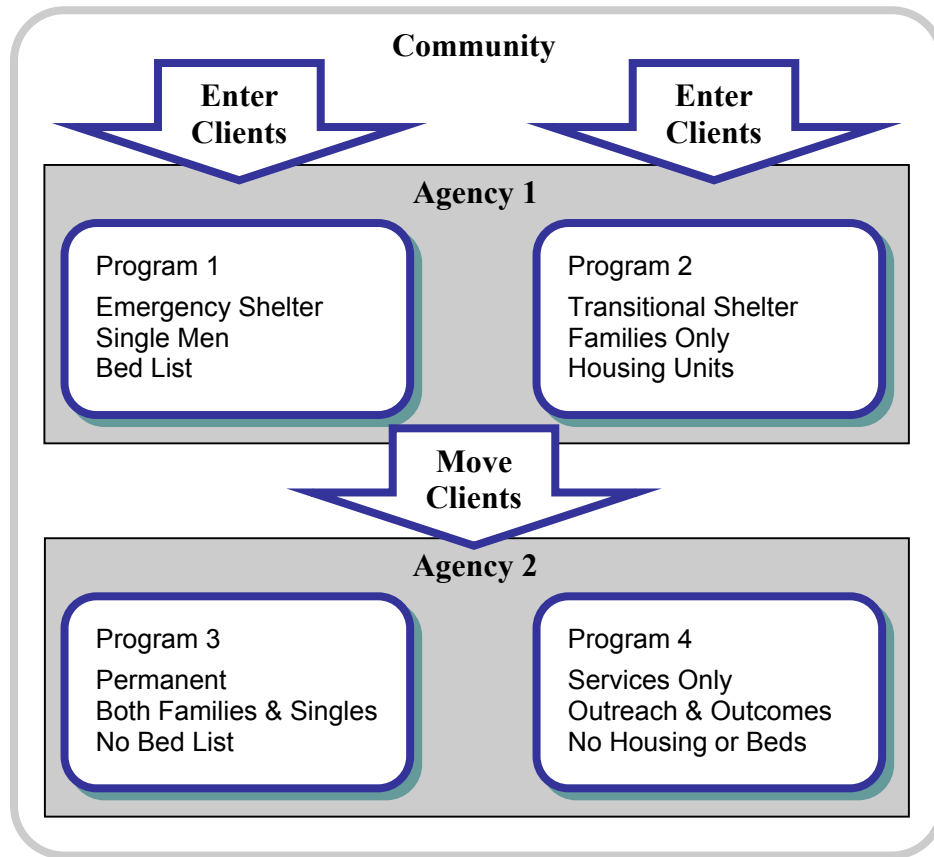
Lab Evaluation Clients and Agency Employees

Once the community structure was defined, client background cases were developed to represent simulated individuals—10 single men and five families—who would receive services from the different programs. Of the 10 single male clients, five suffered from alcohol addictions, and three were diagnosed with mental illnesses including depression, schizophrenia, and Alzheimer's. In addition, two of the men had physical disabilities (blindness and amputation); three were involved in domestic violence cases, two of these cases resulted in jail time; and two were veterans, one from the Vietnam War and the other from World War II. The men's ages ranged from early twenties to mid-eighties, and their race and ethnicities included Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Cambodian.

The five family profiles included various backgrounds, ethnicities, and household structures. Three households had single parents (both male and female head of households), each with multiple children. Specific individuals within these households suffered from HIV infection cases and experienced domestic violence. The two parent families included an immigration related situation as well as job loss circumstances.

To complete the supporting evaluation materials, lab evaluation agency employees were described. Employees included a range of caseworkers, agency directors, and system administrators for the various agencies and programs.

Lab Evaluation Process

To accompany the evaluation plan elements described above, an evaluation protocol was defined to ensure that each HMIS solution was similarly assessed in a structured manner using all of the various evaluation environments and activities. In addition, the evaluation protocol ensured that evaluation activities would be conducted by numerous review team members, thereby subjecting each HMIS solution to a variety of user skill levels and perspectives.

To consistently measure each solution's performance, a set of evaluation criteria was defined. Evaluation criteria assessed the many different aspects of each system, including ease of use, data entry required, comprehensiveness, stability, and support issues. A database was developed to collect lab evaluation results and facilitate analysis.

Conducting the Lab Evaluation

The lab evaluation process was conducted over a 15-week period encompassing over 1,000 person hours. Each HMIS solution received over 95 hours of assessment time. The evaluation process included:

- ◆ Acquisition and installation.
- ◆ Configuration and basic customization.
- ◆ Completion of evaluation activities.
- ◆ Data import.
- ◆ Solution provider support.

Each HMIS solution went through the same steps in the evaluation process, beginning with the acquisition of the system. The solution providers made all of the solutions available for assessment purposes at no cost; therefore, the acquisition process included primarily technical and support related activities without sales or financial steps.

To install the HMIS, some solutions only required the review team to navigate to the solution provider's website using a web browser. Other solutions required the review team to install the application on a server or on each computer. If an HMIS solution offered multiple options for delivering the application, the option requiring the least installation and maintenance by review team members was selected for resource and timing reasons. Once operational, each system was configured to the specifications detailed in the evaluation plan.

Configuration included establishing the:

- ◆ Evaluation community, agency, and program profiles.
- ◆ Evaluation agency employee identities and security permissions.
- ◆ Other basic system administration tasks.

In addition, basic customization was undertaken, which included creating user-defined fields and making minor modifications to system screens. Given the express interest in assessing each HMIS solution's documentation, intuitiveness, and ease of use, the review team relied heavily on documentation materials provided with the system, backed up by phone and email user support during the installation, configuration, and testing phases.

After the system was configured, team members began using it to complete the predefined evaluation tasks. At this initial stage of the assessment, no data were in the HMIS solution other than those created during configuration.

Approximately halfway through the series of evaluation activities, 10,000 client records were imported into the system; thus, the remaining evaluation activities were conducted under "load" conditions, a situation where the database is already managing a significant level of data. Performing the final activities under these conditions enabled the review team to assess whether system performance slowed down or displayed other undesirable conditions with a significant load of client records.

Appendix B: Master List of Identified HMIS Solutions for Initial Survey

Product	Company	Website	Phone	City	State
AWARDS**	Foothold Technology	http://www.footholdtechnology.com	212-780-1450	New York	NY
CAPTAIN*	CAP Systems, Inc.	http://www.capsystems.com	781-341-5440	Stoughton	MA
CaseTrack for Homeless Services	Conejo Systems	http://www.conejosystems.com	323-692-8146	Los Angeles	CA
Central Database System	TRW - Government Services & Support	http://www.trw.com	406-443-8600	Helena	MT
CHIRP**	Colorado Department of Human Services, Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs	http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/shhp/Homeless/HomelessInformation.html	303-866-7355	Denver	CO
CIRAS 2000	ACIT, Inc.	http://www.acitinc.com/ciras.htm	800-610-8688	Maywood	NJ
Client Management System*	Jabr Software, Inc.	http://www.jabr.com/	210-651-3155	San Antonio	TX
Client Track*	Shah Software, Inc.	http://www.shahsoftware.com	800-968-2748	Midland	TX
ClientTouch	Social Work Software	http://www.socialworksoftware.com/	513-860-2192	West Chester	OH
ClientTrack**	Data Systems International	http://www.data-systems.com	888-449-6328	Farmington	UT
Community TechKnowledge	CTK, Inc.	http://www.communitytech.net/	877-441-2111	Austin	TX
PATHWAYS COMPASS**	Pathways Community Network, Inc.	http://www.pcni.org	404-584-6591	Atlanta	GA
C-STAR**	S.D.V.P. Management, Inc.	http://www.cstar.org	619-687-1000	San Diego	CA
DataStart*	James Frazier Associates, Inc.	http://www.datanow.org	412-362-7326	Pittsburgh	PA
FACTORS/SA*	Peter Martin Associates	http://www.petermartin.com/	773-478-2400	Chicago	IL
H.E.A.R.T.*	Software Application Services, Inc.	http://www.sasinc.net	215-723-5070	Souderton	PA
Homeless MIS**	State of Washington, Office of Community Development	www.homeless-mis.net	360-725-2930	Olympia	WA
Homeless Prevention Network*	EPICS - School of Electrical and Computer Engineering - Purdue University	http://epics.ecn.purdue.edu/hpn	765-494-9025	West Lafayette	IN

Product	Company	Website	Phone	City	State
Integrated Client Management Systems and Information & Referral Systems	American Management Systems - Human Services & Labor	http://www.ams.com/sls/solutions/HumanServices.asp	703-227-4000	Fairfax	VA
IRis*	SunCoast Custom Programming & Web Design	http://www.suncoastprograms.com	800-335-8817	Charlotte	NC
MAACLink**	Mid-American Assistance Coalition	http://www.maaclink.org	816-561-2727	Kansas City	MO
MetSYS**	MetSYS Inc.	http://www.metsysinc.com	916-929-8615	Sacramento	CA
OCERS*	Corporation for Standards and Outcomes	http://www.csando.com	800-587-7861	Aliso Viejo	CA
Octopi	Community Networks Corp.	http://www.cnetworks.com/CNC_profile.htm	508-735-9051	Worcester	MA
ROSIE**	Municipal Information Systems, Inc.	http://www.misi.org	800-536-6474	St. Louis	MO
ServicePoint**	Bowman Internet Systems L.L.C.	http://www.bowmansystems.com	888-580-3831	Shreveport	LA
Social Services Software**	Simplicity Computer Solutions, Inc.	http://www.simplicitycs.com	905-683-7743	Pickering	Ontario, Canada
Tapestry*	Vision Link	http://www.visionlink.org	877-876-5465	Boulder	CO
Vesta*	Caracole, Inc.	http://www.caracole.org	513-761-1480	Cincinnati	OH

* HMIS Solutions are included in the guide based solely on initial survey response.

** HMIS Solutions are reviewed indepth in the guide.

Appendix C: Description of Corporation Types

In the company background section of Chapter Three, each solution provider is identified by corporation type. The solution providers in this review include: C Corporations, S Corporations, Limited Liability Companies (LLC), 501(c)3 Corporations, and 501(c)4 Corporations.

The C Corporation is the most common type of corporation. This type of corporation may have an unlimited number of stockholders. Stockholders are usually protected from creditors of the business, and the liability of the stockholder is limited to the amount they have invested.

An S Corporation is configured similarly, but signifies a special tax designation. Entrepreneurial and small businesses are attracted to this type of corporation because it combines advantages of a sole proprietorship, partnership and the corporate forms of business structure.

A Limited Liability Company (LLC) combines the advantages of partnerships and corporations. With an LLC, owners have the option of corporate liability protection for their personal assets from creditors and the tax advantages of partnerships or S Corporations.

501(c)3 and 501(c)4 corporations are tax exempt. 501(c)3 corporations include charitable, religious, educational, scientific, and literacy organizations. 501(c)4 corporations include civic leagues, community organizations and other social welfare organizations.

Additional information may be available at www.irs.gov, Publication 557 (*Tax Exempt Status for Your Organization*).

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